STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

The Long March to a New Dream of Justice

Like the bold activists of the past, let us use the power of nonviolence to create a world without the evil of war and the desperation of poverty.

by Rev. Brian K. Woodson

It is time to imagine a new dream. The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was held on August 28, 2013. All over the nation, many small and not-so-small events were held to commemorate the anniversary, including a memorial march in Washington, D.C., and a commemorative celebration in Oakland's Mosswood Park (in which I played a small part).

The massive march held in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963, is most remembered for the speech that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Although I was only six years old at the time, I can still remember watching that speech in the living room on our one and only black-and-white television set. I remember many anniversaries of that day in later years, often celebrated in church services where a youngster would stand and recite that speech word for word.

"*I still have a dream...*" they would begin reciting. "*It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*"

At the 1963 March on Washington, more than 250,000 people demanded an end to discrimination and full employment for all.

That keynote speech and the martyred man that gave it has become the sealed envelope of the entire march and movement for Civil Rights in America. And now, with the son of a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas in the White House, the question can be asked: Has the dream that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about come true?

Certainly, few people would bristle to see or hear the son of a former enslaved person marrying the daughter of a former slaver. We are assured that in these days of equal opportunity, each of us is assessed by the content of our character and certainly not the color of our skin, or the accent of our voice, for that matter.

But the memory of that day 50 years ago may misrepresent the movement upon which it came into being — and misunderstanding the social, political and moral realities of America in the mid-20th century will not only distort one's view of it, it will mar our ability to remedy the present.

See **Long March to a New Dream** *page 6*

Volunteers Make an Urban Farm Flourish in Albany

This is land that should be farmed, not paved over. It is land that should be planted with crops to feed hungry people, not greedy corporations.

by Lydia Gans

On Earth Day, April 22, 2012, a special version of the Occupy movement began working at the Gill Tract, a sprawling piece of land belonging to the University of California at the corner of Marin and San Pablo Avenues in Albany. They called it Occupy the Farm.

Several hundred people broke into the Gill Tract and proceeded to establish an urban farm. They set up a camp with a portable kitchen and composting toilets. They worked the soil and planted more than two acres with carrots, broccoli, tomatoes and more.

Effie Rawlings explains how it all came about. In 2011, she took a class that aroused her interest in urban farming, taught by Miguel Altieri, professor of agroecology at UC Berkeley in the Department of Environmental Science. A trip with friends and fellow students to the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center inspired them all.

Volunteer farmers at Gill Tract farm are producing bountiful crops of healthy, organic vegetables and giving them to people in the community. Lydia Gans photo

"On our way home," Rawlings recalls, "we were thinking about how amazing it would be to have a thing like that closer to an urban area where more people could access it. As we started having that conversation, we passed by the Gill Tract and we said, 'Hey, what about that place?'"

They knew about the history of the Gill Tract and its mandate to serve as public education. Threatened by the University of California's attempts to turn it into commercial property, they decided to fight it by the signature act of resistance of the Occupy movement — occupation.

The activists aimed to create a model for sustainable urban farming. UC officials moved against them with a vengeance. They put heavy locks on the gates so the campers had to pass supplies over the fence. When UC officials turned off the water, the campers passed gallons of water in heavy jugs over the fence, always under the eyes of the police.

The camp lasted for three weeks. Then, the University came rolling in with heavy equipment and evicted the campers.

Gabrielle Silverman was one of the campers. She had participated in Occupy Oakland but she was particularly moved by the camp experience at the farm.

"What was so excellent about Occupy the Farm was that it brought a land consciousness to the Occupy movement," says Silverman. "We had that connection with the MST in Brazil — the landless peoples movement in Brazil. It was an expression of a global consciousness that also acts very locally and very concretely."

Silverman went on to say, "We came together at Occupy the Farm and we made the place grow, we made it bloom and we built real community — and, of course,

See **Urban Farm Flourishes** *page 4*

Life-and-Death Issues in the Prison Hunger Strike

by Laura Magnani

About 30,000 prisoners went on a hunger strike on July 8, 2013, to protest the dehumanizing conditions of confinement in California prisons, especially the long-term isolation and sensory deprivation in security housing units.

According to research conducted by the American Friends Service Committee, more than 14,500 prisoners are held in some kind of solitary confinement in California, though it goes by several different names — security housing units, administrative segregation, protective custody, psychiatric services units, and adjustment centers on death row.

The current hunger strike has primarily focused on people in the security housing units (SHU), with an estimated 3600 prisoners; and people in administrative segregation (Ad Seg), where another 7600 people are confined.

As of this writing at the end of August, dozens of prisoners were in their 55th day of refusing solid food. We have heard reports of widespread dizziness, vomiting, vomiting blood and extreme dehydration.

In recent weeks, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has provided vitamins and electrolytes, in the form of Gatorade or Pedialyte, which has helped with hydration, but many have required intravenous hydration to keep fluids down. Organ failure and death are very real possibilities at this stage of starvation.

Why would so many people take such drastic measures? Conditions of confinement in these high-security, solitary cells are intolerable and more than 500 people have endured these conditions for over 10 years. Nearly 100 have been in these torturous conditions for more than 20 years.

People are living in cells that measure 8 feet by 11 feet (cells vary slightly from institution to institution). They are allowed no calls to family members except for emergencies. They have no contact visits. At Pelican Bay State Prison, they have not seen the sun since being sent to the SHU. Their exercise time is spent in another cage, alone, inside the prison. Activities, to the extent that there are any, are all done alone, inside their cells.

This year's hunger strike follows two earlier ones in 2011. The five core demands of the hunger strikers have received widespread support:

1. Individual Accountability

Prisoners demand an end to CDCR's use of "group punishments" — the loss of privileges for entire yards, or for all prisoners of an ethnic group — for rule violations by a single prisoner, or a few.

2. Abolish the debriefing policy, and modify gang status criteria

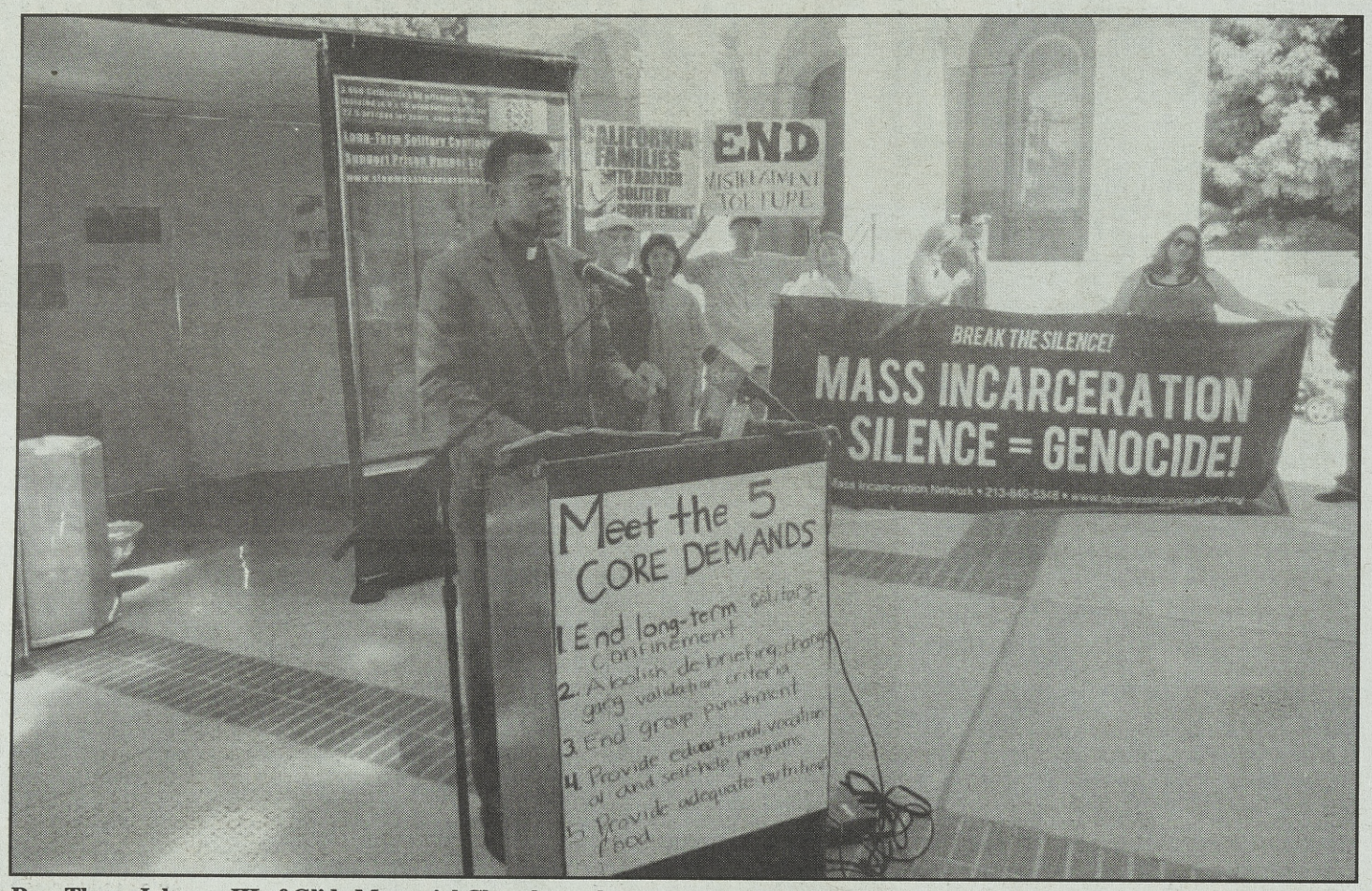
Racial profiling via gang affiliation labels are imposed by CDCR staff, without judicial review. Such a "gang status" label will punish a prisoner in solitary for years, from which he can escape only by "debriefing" — snitching on other alleged gang members — or by dying or being paroled.

3. Comply with U.S. Commission recommendations on an end to long-term solitary confinement

This would require using isolation only as a last resort, and ensuring that prisoners have access to natural light and meaningful activities, and are free of physical deprivations that cause lasting harm.

4. Adequate health care and food

Provide constitutional levels of health care, as required by the courts. Cease the practice of denying adequate food, as a form of punishment. Make sure food is uncontaminated and unspoiled.



Rev. Theon Johnson III of Glide Memorial Church speaks out on the steps of the State Capitol in Sacramento, telling prison officials and legislators to meet the striking prisoners' five demands, including an end to long-term solitary confinement.

5. Provide constructive programs and privileges for SHU inmates

California SHUs are among the harshest punitive environments in the country. Strikers simply want their everyday lives to be put on par with other SHU units around the country.

New Policies Implemented in Pilot Project

A year after the second hunger strike in 2011, new policies were issued from CDCR to address the gang validation process, create a step-down program to give people a way out of the SHU without becoming informants for the Department of Corrections, and set up a case-by-case review process for people in the SHU. These policies are being rolled out as a "pilot project" which they hope eventually to translate into new regulations.

CDCR claims it is a behavior-based program that separates gang validation from referral to SHU, and that for people who are in solitary, the new norm will be four years, rather than the existing six years.

Over the past ten months, about 400 prisoners have had their case reviews — some in a SHU facility and others in Ad Seg. Of those receiving hearings, more than 60 percent have been authorized for transfer to general population and about 30 percent have been placed in one of the steps in the step-down program.

Never could we have imagined, when recommending creation of a step-down program, that it would be a four year process — especially when people have already spent many years in isolation.

Neither did we imagine that "behavior" would be interpreted as having a particular piece of art, a tattoo, or a book in one's cell. Indeed, people who exhibit violent behavior receive fixed sentences, usually to Ad Seg, and are eventually released to general population. Indefinite sentences are still permitted for gang affiliation, whether or not it involves action.

The real disappointment in the new policies, besides the duration of the program, and the absence of any limitation on length of stay, is the discretionary way that policies can be applied.

The Department of Corrections says it has ended indefinite SHU sentences, but it retains the authority to hold people back, step by step, for having the wrong attitude, failure to "cooperate," talking to the wrong people, indeed for participating in a hunger strike. Virtually anything can be considered "gang behavior," especially if more than one person is involved.

What do the prisoners themselves say about what they are doing? Sitawa Nantambu Jimaa, one of the four strike representatives at Pelican Bay, said recently, "As people who have suffered under such a brutal, diabolical system, we realize that it is our responsibility to help change the course of violent prison systems that have made their way to our communities... We called for an end to hostilities to eliminate giving prison guards an excuse to kill prisoners. We realize nothing productive can be done to change the current state of our situation, our prison environment, unless we end the hostilities between prisoners and end all racial and gang violence within the CDCR. We feel that prisoners are the victims of a systematic process that manipulates them through racial and gang violence in order to prevent greater unity."

The only way the strike can end without any more participants dying is if the Department of Corrections begins to see the prisoners as humans, not just as people who have committed crimes, usually decades earlier. Without this breakthrough there will be deaths.

On August 14, 2013, Arturo Castellanos, another prisoner confined in Pelican Bay,

See **California Prison Hunger Strike** *page 3*

California Bishops Statement on Prison Hunger Strike and Isolation Policies

"Some men on this hunger strike have been in isolation for up to 35 years with very minimal human contact. International human rights standards consider more than 15 days in isolation to be torture."

Sacramento, August 29, 2013 – The following joint statement was issued today on behalf of the California Conference of Catholic Bishops concerning the current prisoner hunger strike and state policies on prisoner isolation:

Today marks Day 52 of the California prisoner hunger strike. We, the California Conference of Catholic Bishops, once again extend our offer to Gov. Brown and Dr. Jeffrey Beard, Secretary of the Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), to assist in the resolution of this urgent life-threatening situation. We offer to serve Gov. Brown and Dr. Beard on any outside oversight committee that may be convened to investigate any alleged human rights violations in California's prisons in order to propose the necessary corrective measures.

As the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote in their pastoral letter, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (dated November 15, 2000), "We oppose the increasing use of isolation units, especially in the absence of due process and the monitoring and professional assessment of the effects of such confinement on the mental health of inmates." No one affected by crime is helped when a human being is subjected to this inhumane form of punishment. The California Catholic Bishops have voiced concerns and have been in dialogue with the CDCR for 12 years on the very issues being surfaced now.

We stand opposed to any form of unjust, inhumane treatment. While it may be that isolation mitigates gang activity, placing humans in isolation in a Secure Housing Unit (SHU) has no restorative or rehabilitative purpose. It is not a sustainable solution to legitimate security concerns. Some of the men on this hunger strike have been in isolation for up to 35 years with very minimal human contact. International human rights standards consider more than 15 days in isolation to be torture.

Our prayers and concern go out to the men involved in this hunger strike and their families. Our prayers and concern also go out to all who are affected by the criminal justice system: prison leadership, staff, correctional officers and administrators; as well as to crime victims and their families, who have endured the pain and suffering of criminal violence. We offer our assistance to state officials to resolve this terrible situation.

Religious Call for a Just and Humane End to the Hunger Strike in California Prisons

"A Religious Call for a Just and Humane End to the Hunger Strike in California Prisons" has been signed by over 1000 clergy and religious leaders.

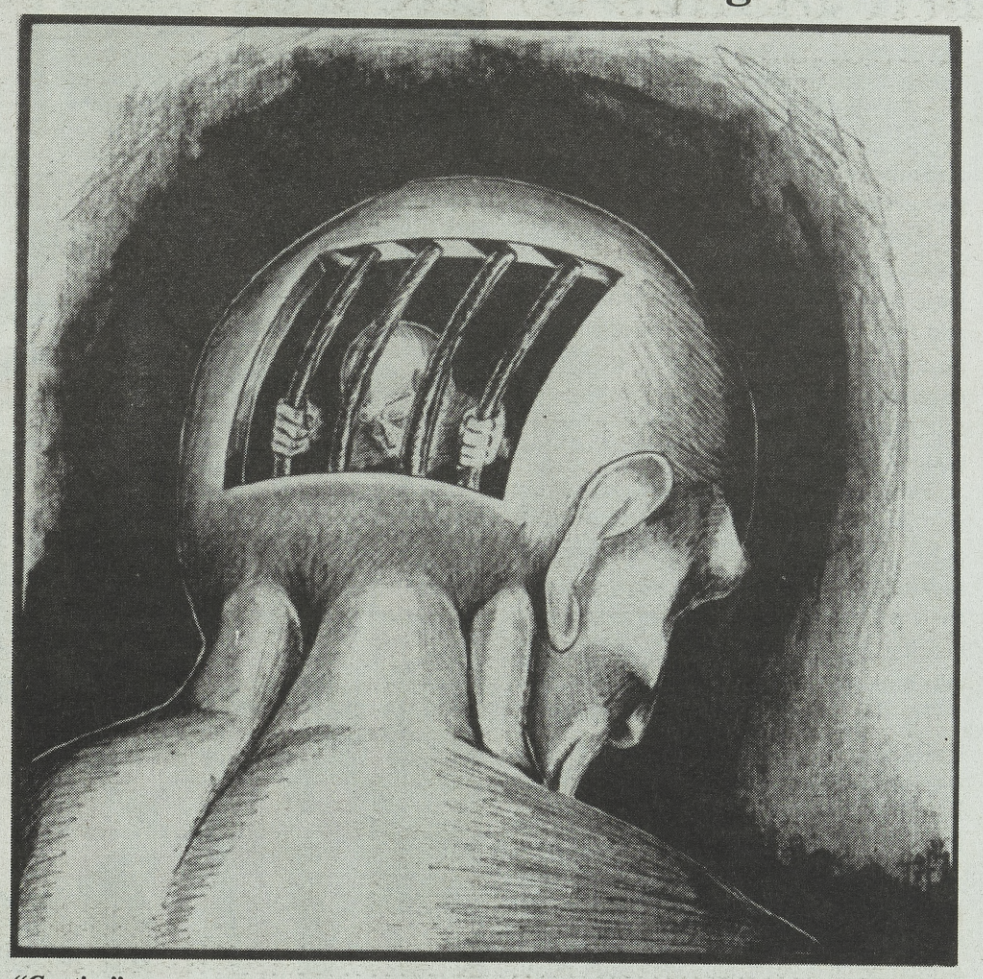
Dear Governor Brown:

We write as clergy and religious leaders in California and throughout the United States who stand in support of the five demands of the California state prison inmates who have now resumed their peaceful hunger strike. These core demands for reform are related to solitary confinement – a practice where prisoners are confined to a small, windowless cell, without sunlight, fresh air, meaningful human contact or constructive activity for many years, even decades.

Our various faith traditions hold in common a belief in the dignity and worth of each human person. Prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement violates basic religious values of justice, compassion, and healing.

The scale of prolonged solitary confinement in California is staggering, with well over ten thousand adult prisoners currently held in some form of solitary confinement in California prisons. California leads the nation in the percentage of its state prison inmates who are subjected to this abusive treatment at any given time. Another very disturbing feature of solitary confinement in California is the high percentage of people of color subjected to it. Actual numbers are not kept, but estimates suggest that 90% of inmates in Security Housing Units are people of color.

We realize that a number of changes have been made in policies related to solitary confinement since the last hunger strikes. However, these changes do not place any limits on the length of time a person can be held in these conditions.



"Captive" Art by Todd Tarselli

Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture. Cut off from any normal human interaction, enduring sensory and physical deprivation, many prisoners describe their experience in the SHU as the experience of being "buried alive." Juan Mendez, Special Rapporteur for Torture for the United Nations, has testified that indefinite and prolonged solitary confinement in excess of 15 days should be subject to an absolute prohibition. Article I of the UN Convention Against Torture prohibits policies and practices that "constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment."

While prison and public safety are cited as reasons for prolonged solitary confinement, we believe that prison safety, and public safety, can be maintained consistent with principles of humanity and human rights. Religious leaders throughout the United States have advocated for an end to the use of prolonged solitary confinement because it is a destructive practice. In states, including Mississippi and Maine, where significant reductions have been made in the use of solitary confinement, there has been an increase in institutional safety.

"Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture."

We support the five core demands which include: (1) eliminate group punishments for individual rules violations, (2) comply with the recommendations of the US Commission on Safety and Abuse in Prisons (2006) regarding an end to long-term solitary confinement, (3) expand and provide constructive programs and privileges for indefinite SHU inmates, (4) abolish the debriefing policy and modify active/inactive gang status criteria, and (5) provide adequate food.

Those most directly impacted are the thousands of human beings in solitary confinement. The circumstances of their detention causes anguish for their families and loved ones. Yet, all of us are impacted, because the way in which we as a society treat those in prison pervades our culture and diminishes us all.

We are calling on you to honor the reasonable core demands of prisoners in SHU in order to bring this hunger strike to a swift and humane end.

California Prison Hunger Strike

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wrote: "I am one of the four principal volunteer representatives here at Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP) in the Security Housing Units (SHU). I have been here on indefinite SHU since I arrived in 1990." Castellanos says that the CDCR, often with the cooperation of the FBI, is "now playing the old propaganda agenda by ... personally attacking the 20 named volunteer prisoner representatives from the PBSP SHU Short Corridor, especially the four groups — White, Black and Latino from the Northern and Southern parts of California — united in this common cause to radically change CDCR for prisoners, prisoners families and the overall true safety of our outside communities with our 'Call to End all Hostilities' paper, our Five Core Demands and 40 supplemental demands."

"The same rationale, that the strike is simply a manifestation of gang control, was used when the medical receiver's office, providing medical care for the state prison system, went to court in the fifth week of the strike to get an order allowing them to begin force feeding prisoners. They made the argument that some prisoners who had signed 'do not resuscitate' directives could have been coerced, therefore all such directives should be ruled invalid. It perpetuates the infantilizing of prisoners and reinforces the CDCR narrative that people are only on hunger strike because gangs are forcing them to be."

As readers of *Street Spirit* are well aware, hunger strikes are a revered nonviolence tactic used by Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, homeless advocate Mitch Snyder, and many others to call attention to extreme hardships and injustices.

Experienced practitioners of nonviolence — such as Gandhi or Cesar Chavez — warned of the serious risks of potential long-term damage to the physical health of hunger strikers. When the opponent in a nonviolent struggle refuses or fails to acknowledge the humanity of the hunger strikers, all may be lost. It is sobering to remember that Cesar Chavez fasted to the point of permanently harming his own health, and died prematurely.

Will the Department of Corrections see the humanity of the prisoners and sit down with them to find a solution? Or will they add to the torture of long-term solitary confinement the additional torture of force feeding?

The demands of the strikers are not unreasonable. The Department says the tactics are unacceptable and can't be "allowed." What alternatives do these prisoners have? The grievance process within the system, known as the 602 process, is completely broken. The 602 forms are frequently lost, often disregarded, and always decided on internally.

On August 30, a joint press release was issued by Senator Lonnie Hancock, chair of the Senate Public Safety Committee, and Assemblymember Tom Ammiano, chair of the Assembly Public Safety Committee, stating: "The issues raised by the hunger strike — concerns about the use and conditions of solitary confinement in California's prisons — are real and can no longer be ignored. The Courts have made clear that the hunger strikers have legitimate issues of policy and practice that must be reviewed. The Legislature has a critical role in considering and acting on their concerns. We cannot sit by and watch our state pour money into a system that the U.S. Supreme Court has declared does not provide constitutionally acceptable conditions of confinement and that statistics show has failed to increase public safety."

"The strike is not over yet and it is still at a very dangerous moment, given that ... people have gone [so many] days without eating," said Marie Levin, whose brother is one of the four remaining strike representatives locked in Administrative Segregation at Pelican Bay. "We hope that the CDCR will not act to disrupt this potentially positive development by spreading false information to strikers or continuing to retaliate against their peaceful protest."

The urgent plea of the American Friends Service Committee and the many partnering groups who have stood in solidarity with the strikers is for CDCR to agree to put a cap on sentences in security housing units. Our own time limit, which is backed by UN documents, would be 18 months. Beyond that, people must have access to outdoor time, regular calls to family members, interaction with at least a small group of other prisoners, meaningful activities, adequate food and health care.

In addition, there must be avenues for redressing grievances other than the 602 process. Many of the conditions in these units came about arbitrarily, as forms of group punishment over time. Many of them are still in place. Others were revised with previous hunger strikes. It shouldn't take drastic measures like starvation to bring about simple changes. Regular, respectful communication is essential to achieving justice in these systems.

As *Street Spirit* was going to press, there were two late-breaking developments. One was the promise by legislators of a joint hearing on solitary confinement in the Fall, with a strong sense from Senator Hancock and Assemblymember Ammiano that there is a major problem that needs attention. The real question is whether state legislators will put laws in place to prevent the abusive conditions that led to the hunger strike.

The other development was a promised phone conversation immediately after Labor Day between the Mediation Team, on which I serve, the four representatives of the four ethnic groups at Pelican Bay, and Department of Corrections officials.

Although the Mediation Team has been meeting with the officials off and on throughout the strike (and before), it has been difficult to make progress because the Department of Corrections refuses to "negotiate." The call was for "communicating, not negotiating."

If the prisoners are satisfied with these steps and decide they can safely begin to eat again, there will still be a lot to do to bring the issues to light through the hearings and to make the needed changes.

Go to http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.workpress.com for the latest information. See also the www.afsc.org and www.NRCAT.org for in-depth materials.

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Street Spirit

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THE JAZZMAN FOLLOWS THE SKY UP TO THE ROOF

Short story by George Wynn

Hank walks down a narrow alley carrying a suitcase and bedroll. It is still light out as he comes out onto Larkin Street and passes a Vietnamese sandwich shop and a Vietnamese restaurant, and then goes over to observe the stone lions welcoming folks to Little Saigon.

He walks down Eddy Street and sees an opportunity and follows an elderly Asian lady who leaves a tinge of the door open as she enters her building. He walks up to the roof. After he lays down his pack and bedroll, he takes long, deep breaths to calm his shaking hands.

Borderline Parkinson's, the doctor at the free clinic by the Civic Auditorium said. Hank dropped off his horn at a South of Market pawnshop this afternoon. No use struggling to play with trembling fingers.

He puts on his headphones and turns the walkman on to KCSM, the Bay Area's jazz station. A smooth and sweet Duke Ellington-Jimmy Blanton piano-bass duet elicits a lusty, "Oh yeah!" from smiling Hank. He scans the roof: no clothesline. Not many people come up here. Maybe he can get some solitude and some good nights' sleep.

Hank looks out over the roof, seeing the Tenderloin below. People walking around, with beaten and hostile faces, arguing in the streets, free as pigeons fighting for scraps.

Jazz expands space in his head. His brain riffs with new possibilities. He can imagine himself as a man on edge with a cue stick suddenly presented with a gift of *creative angles from a bottled-up position* on the velvet green of a billiard table.

He remembers how he wound up on this roof. He had been listening to some cats older than him blow in New Orleans' Louis Armstrong Park, the sounds mellowing him out, imagining railroad cars, first in slow motion, then speeding up.

The thought of "Gotta get away, gotta take a chance... even if it's a slim one," wouldn't leave him. The next day, Hank said good-bye to New Orleans and boarded an Amtrak train headed for the San Francisco Bay. It was his first venture outside the South, other than his stint in the service.

Hank had made a small living, very small, playing horn. Most of his gigs were little night clubs in New Orleans. Now and then, he'd have a nice payday doing studio work as a sideman in bigger ensemble bands. Technically he was only fair, but he had a great feeling, and was a good accompanist.

Hank sleeps well his first night on the roof in the Tenderloin, then eats his meals at St. Anthony's and Glide, and strikes out looking for work in pizza shops and fast food places. He keeps his spirits up by hearing a jazz soundtrack in his head. It gets him in motion and prevents brooding.

He sleeps well his second night on the roof, relaxing to a cool, pretty Roy Eldridge trumpet solo, "Rocking Chair." Later Charlie Mingus' bass closes his eyelids.

It rains the next two days, but he is prepared with a poncho that an attractive Creole woman, the love of his life, who passed on two years ago, gave him on his 66th birthday. He hates the thought of a shelter and being walled in. Hank can sleep anywhere. He's done special training in snow mountain country in the service.

That night, Hank dreams about a white man pummeling him to a bloody pulp. He wakes with a start, remembering when he was an exhausted kid who lost his water bottle on a scorching hot Little Rock day and didn't know any better and sat down in the white section of the bus. A big white man kicked him in the privates. Man alive, what pain!

Bastard musta wore a size 13 at least!

Even though he has no luck finding work, he can't wait each day to follow the sky up to the open air of the roof and listen to jazz. One night he's startled by the opening of the roof door and covers his eyes from the blaze of flashlights.

"SFPD," announces a big, bespectacled cop. "We got a phone call about a suspicious person on the roof."

Another big cop moves toward him, the spitting image of the man in Little Rock who kicked him in his private parts.

"This ain't my town," says Hank under his breath.

"What are you doing up here?" demands the cop.

"I don't know sir," says Hank. "I was trying to get some sleep and listen to jazz."

"You're trespassing. This is private property, plus you can't sleep outside in this city." The bespectacled cop writes out a ticket and hands it to Hank, who stuffs it in his overcoat pocket. "We'll escort you downstairs."

Once back down on the street, spitting image says, "You're free to go, but next time it'll be the county jail."

Now Hank walks back from the French Quarter, where he plays trumpet for pocket change on the street. Work is sparse in this economy. The shaking in his hands that started in San Francisco mysteriously disappears once he's back in New Orleans. He passes by Louis Armstrong Park. The same cats are still blowing.

"Hey Hank," yells the sax player, the ace of the bunch. "Hear you spent a week in San Francisco. I played at the Blackhawk on the corner of Turk and Hyde Street in '63. It was great!"

Hank doesn't say anything. He grips his case, holding his horn extra tight and walks off down Rampart Street.

"Saxman Uptown" Painting by Arnold White

Urban Farm Flourishes in Albany

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they came and crushed us."

The farmers returned three times for weekends of planting and harvesting. They had produced bountiful crops of healthy, organic vegetables which they brought to people in the community.

Now, for five months until November, the campers' vision of an urban farm is being brought back to life. UC Professor Miguel Altieri has brought together people from various community groups, including Albany Farm Alliance, Merritt College, Albany Children's Center, Occupy the Farm and others, along with some of his own graduate students, in an agroecological research project.

In an article in the *Daily Californian*, Altieri wrote, "This project is a unique opportunity not only to rebuild trust among the university and the community in the aftermath of the land occupation, but also to break the linear mold of conventional research by creating bridges between scientists and communities through the use of shared knowledge and valuable experience in urban agriculture." At the end of this period, the community gardeners at the Gill Tract will share their produce with the community.

Ten teams of four people each have their own plots where they decide what to plant and what methods to use. It is an opportunity to test different farming techniques and, at the end of the project, they will measure the amount and quality of the crops they produce.

The aim is to develop a method that will produce at least "five kilograms of edible biomass per square meter per year," Altieri explains. "Reaching such yields would make a huge difference in solving food security problems in low-income neighborhoods of the East Bay if the lessons from our project can be extended via urban farmer to urban farmer networks."

David Grefrath, known as Farmer Dave, is part of the research group and has been helping supply the plants and all the necessary supplies to the teams. Grefath and others were part of Occupy Oakland.

"We were in contact with Miguel before we went out to the farm the first time," Grefath says, adding that some participants "were students of Miguel's, which is how they learned about the tract originally."

The team members have access to the tract for three hours a day, several days a week, to work on their plots. Team members have different reasons for their participation in the project.

Karen is a school gardener at Albany Children's Center preschool. "I'm here because we don't have enough space to grow what we need for school lunch," she explains. "I'm doing this as a volunteer to get more food into the school so the kids can have a healthier lunch than what the government provides."

An older couple are growing vegetables to share with members of their seniors organization. A couple of farmers who were in the process of dividing a flat of starts between them commented with a grin, "They wanted us to compete against each other, but nobody is going for that — like if somebody doesn't have enough peas and they have some corn ..."

There will be an open house in the middle of October and the project is expected to end with the last harvest in the middle of November. There is no indication at this time of any plans to continue the farming experiment.

The project has brought hope and inspiration to people interested in urban farming as a way to provide nutritious, organic food for poor people at little or no cost. It is a very modest event on a small plot of land for only four months involving only 40 participants. There were easily a hundred or more people who were interested in taking part.

There is much more that can and must be done. Research is needed to develop methods for urban farming, which is very different from large-scale agriculture.

The Gill Tract is a big space. The northern portion is already designated for agricultural research and only a part of it is being used for an experimental corn research project. The equally large southern portion of the Tract lies unkempt and unused except by a flock of turkeys.

The University of California's efforts to bring commercial development to the southern portion is being vehemently opposed. Whole Foods had an agreement with UC officials to open a market there, but then pulled out. Now Sprouts Market has contracted to open there. This would mean paving over a large part of the land for the store and parking lot.

There will be protests. There will be an Occupy movement that resists this kind of commercial exploitation. This is land that should be tilled and fertilized and made productive, not paved over.

It is land that should be used to fulfill the promise made by Altieri's project to engage people in urban gardening. It is land that should be planted with crops to feed hungry people, not greedy corporations.

Celebrating Advances in the Battle Against Hepatitis C

This disease is a killer. It was coming after the ones closest to me. But it looks like they have this monster on the ropes and there is tremendous reason for celebration.

by Dan McMullan

The Berkeley Free Clinic and LifeLong Medical Care helped celebrate World Hepatitis Awareness Day in Oakland's Snow Park.

Dr. Diana Sylvestre, director of Oasis Clinic.

A concert in Snow Park celebrates Oasis Clinic's work to eradicate hepatitis C.

In 1984, I was in a serious motorcycle accident that put me in the hospital for more than a year. The many operations and blood transfusions I went through left me with hepatitis C. After everything else I went through, that really didn't worry me much at the time.

I had never seen anyone sick with the disease before my accident, and for several years afterwards, I still never saw anyone who had come down with the illness.

Then about 10 years ago, the strangest things started to happen. A friend would feel ill, vomit up some blood, go to the hospital — and I would never see them again. It got scary. More and more people I knew were dying.

Does everyone have this disease? It seemed like it was everywhere! In the last three years, I lost a half-dozen friends, many that were very close to me. They were people from all walks of life: doctors, nurses, lawyers, politicians, business owners, truck drivers.

Then my personal care attendant got sick. We are very close. She has taken care of me for more than 15 years. It seems to me that the disease really likes to kick in at middle age when your hormones go through changes.

Most people with hepatitis C experience very few or no symptoms for many years after initially being infected. It often takes decades until liver damage caused by the virus shows up.

So many great people have been lost. Most never even knew they had the disease. Among a group that lived at a commune up north where it was very common to share a razor or even a toothbrush, the disease was spread rapidly. Who knew?

At least now we know that hepatitis C is spread primarily by transfusions, blood-to-blood contact, poorly sterilized medical equipment and IV drug use.

At the time I found out about it, they were just realizing the nation's blood supply was infecting hundreds of thousands. Public health officials still do not know how many people have hepatitis C because so few are tested.

You can get a routine blood test that covers 100 different things from your physician and still the hepatitis C virus (HCV) is not one of them. But the disease is widespread. An estimated 150-200 million people in the world, and four million Americans are infected with hepatitis C.

At the time when the nurse said the doctor wanted to speak to me about my blood results, the possibility of AIDS was what had my heart beating out of my chest. I was actually relieved when he said it was hepatitis.

But now, 30 years later, it is a different story. This thing was a killer. Now it was coming after the ones closest to me. And with two young sons to raise, I always had it in the back of my mind that it would come for me too, one day soon.

I felt an overwhelming urge to fight back, but where do you begin? I can't have my usual sleep-out in someone's bloodstream or picket their liver. I needed to get treatment for my friend and personal care attendant. The thing about hepatitis C is, if you have this disease, and you don't have any symptoms, it's the very last thing you ever want to think about.

In my work with homeless people, I have all kinds of flyers that I pick up to amass information. So I dug frantically through what I like to call the "Bob Sparks Memorial Library" — a huge stack of papers in disarray, just like Bob Sparks used to do it — and I found it: Oasis Clinic in Oakland, a clinic that attends to the health care and social needs of people infected with hepatitis C.

Before we went down to check out Oasis, my friend and I had an appointment with Dr. Jacob Lalezari at Quest Clinical Research in San Francisco. Quest is doing trials with the latest therapies for hepatitis C and other blood-borne diseases, and although we just missed getting my friend into a trial, we both put ourselves on their list.

There actually was one opening left for a male, but there was no way I was going to accept it while my best friend is sitting there in tears because she is dying. I could wait. And I did.

So it was at the regular Tuesday support meeting at the Oasis Clinic where we finally got the real story about this medical problem and got my friend into treatment. The treatment included interferon and some other medications that are no picnic. The treatment lasted 28 weeks, but at the end it was entirely successful and her hepatitis C was no more.

The Oasis Clinic is run by Dr. Diana Sylvestre. Oasis is a great program that not only offers treatment, but has the best support group and activists I have ever seen. Their work is all the more impressive since, in my experience, not many general practitioners are aware of the rapid advances in the treatment of this disease.

Then, one week after the Oasis treatment for my friend, I got a call from Dr. Lalezari at Quest in San Francisco. "Would I like to take part in Phase III of the Abbvie study?" This study has a 97 percent cure rate and uses no interferon, so I jumped at the chance.

Within the first two weeks, I was completely clear of the virus. (That's a 30 million viral load to 0 or undetectable.) After the 12-week treatment, I am still clear of the virus and feel great. Throughout the treatment, I had no major side effects. I couldn't whine to anyone and even felt bad for all those that were cured by earlier, more difficult treatments.

But it looks like they have this monster on the ropes and there is tremendous reason for celebration.

I went in to talk to my therapist that I have been seeing to work on my memory loss and PTSD from getting hit by a truck while in my wheelchair. I told her about what I had been going through, and after I was done speaking, she stood up and lifted up her pant leg. Right above her ankle were the letters HCV in a red circle and a line through it.

She had contracted the disease as a nurse before she changed jobs and became a therapist! She found out only after being tested for everything else under the sun. Got treated, got cured, and now has the privilege of hearing my troubles once a week! (One of my friends, after hearing the story, said they would rather vomit blood and keel over than have to hear my troubles!)

The thing now is to defeat the stigma attached to this disease, get people tested and get people cured. It's unacceptable that I, you or anyone else should lose another loved one to this sickness.

We are dedicated to educate and eradicate. So it was with great pleasure that I attended the World Hepatitis Awareness Day Event sponsored by Oasis Clinic and supported by Berkeley Free Clinic and LifeLong Medical at Snow Park (Lake Merritt) in Oakland on July 28, 2013.

It was fun for the first time to not only talk about a cure, but to declare, "I just was cured, and so was my friend here." And him, and her, and those two — pointing out people all over the park.

So get tested! Get treated! Live longer! We need you! Here are some numbers to get you started.

OASIS CLINIC

Phone: (510) 834-5442
520 27th St., Oakland, CA 94612

QUEST CLINICAL RESEARCH

Phone: (415) 353-0800
2300 Sutter St., Suite 202, San Francisco, CA 94115

Daniel J. McMullan is the director of the Disabled People Outside Project, and a commissioner on Berkeley's Human Welfare and Community Action Commission.

The Long March to a New Dream of Justice

from page 1

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech to a massive gathering in front of the Lincoln Memorial at the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on Aug. 28, 1963. AP Photo/File

Fifty years ago, America was a tinderbox awaiting the spark. The American ethos that had enslaved millions and created myths of race to support it had morphed into a Jim and Jane Crow reality. The U.S. Constitution declared an equality of all citizens, while the laws and lived experiences were completely different. White nationalism (the notion that America really exists for whites) in its various forms was the lived reality from Northern Maine to Southern California.

Byron Williams, author and columnist, has just published a must-read book, *1963: The Year of Hope and Hostility*, where he argues that 1963 may have been one of the most pivotal years in American history. I think he is right.

The Year of Assassinations

On May 28, 1963, Medgar Evers, who worked with the NAACP to end racial segregation and white violence against the blacks of Mississippi, had his house firebombed while he slept with his wife and family. Two weeks later, on June 12, 1963, Evers was murdered in his own driveway, shot to death by a member of the White Citizens' Council, Byron de la Beckwith.

It was in 1963 that Dr. King, imprisoned on April 12 for a nonviolent march against racial segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, wrote the now famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

In 1963, Governor George Wallace stood in the door of the Foster Auditorium of the University of Alabama to prevent Vivian Malone and James Hood, two African Americans, from enrolling. President Kennedy had to send in the National Guard to insure that they would be enrolled. Gov. Wallace's infamous words were: "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever."

Those same words were repeated from Wallace's inaugural speech in which he more fully exposed his perspective: "In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

The "greatest people" Gov. Wallace was referring to were the Southern Whites represented by the likes of Jefferson Davis, the provisional president of the Confederate States of America.

Less than one month after the historic march on Washington, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Denise McNair, four young girls getting ready for choir rehearsal, were killed when the 16th Street Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama, was bombed on Sept. 15, 1963.

This was a time when the efforts of African Americans to claim and acquire the basic human rights afforded others were met with violence and disdain from the core culture of America. Yet, the March on Washington was not a march for African-American equality alone, or even primarily. It was not a march so that a core culture person could freely associate with and perhaps even marry an African American.

It was a march that rose upon a million prayers and practices of people who sought economic, social and political justice. The mainstream media and even President Kennedy did all they could to thwart the march. Even on the day of the march, Kennedy had troops stationed, hospitals on standby and plans made to quell the violence many were sure would occur should the march proceed.

This is in large part because the March on Washington was held to declare that there was something fundamentally wrong with, and in, America. The march was not just for African Americans and it did not just feature African Americans. It was a march that rose on the crest of a wave of change sweeping across America.

We have been taught to remember the Rev. Martin Luther King's speech and his dream in a false frame. Dr. King's life goal was not that his daughters be able to marry interracially if they so chose, but that the world they lived in would be a more just and equitable one. His speech, though eloquent and the concluding address, was not the only important address heard by the 250,000 people on the mall and the millions more at home watching. Much of what was said on that day is conveniently forgotten or deliberately not celebrated.

Architects of the March: Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph

Important addresses were also delivered that day by the two key organizers of the historic march: A. Philip Randolph, who had given birth to the idea of a mass march on Washington, and Bayard Rustin, the major architect of the march.

A. Philip Randolph was a leader in the civil rights struggle, and a pioneering labor union organizer who was president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and vice-president of the AFL-CIO. He spoke first at the March on Washington, calling for economic justice and full employment for the millions living in poverty.

Randolph said, "We know that we have no future in a society in which six million black and white people are unemployed and millions more live in poverty. Nor is the goal of our civil rights revolution merely the passage of civil rights legislation. Yes, we want all public accommodations open to all citizens, but those accommodations will mean little to those who cannot afford to use them. Yes, we want a fair employment practice act, but what good will it do if profit-geared automation destroys the jobs of millions of workers, black and white?"

Bayard Rustin was the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, and a key strategist of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference who had studied Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns in India. At the march, he urgently called for immediate action to end discrimination.

Rustin said, "We demand that segregation be ended in every school district in the year 1963! We demand that we have effective civil rights legislation — no compromise, no filibuster — and that include public accommodations, decent housing, integrated education, FEPC and the right to vote. What do you say? We demand the withholding of federal funds from all programs in which discrimination exists. What do you say?" [FEPC was the Fair Employment Practices Committee created by President Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, which stated, "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin."]

John Lewis and SNCC

The youngest speaker that day was John Lewis from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Several members of SNCC, including Lewis, wrote his speech:

"We march today for jobs and freedom, but we have nothing to be proud of, for hundreds and thousands of our brothers are not here, for they are receiving starvation wages or no wages at all. While we stand here, there are sharecroppers in the Delta of Mississippi who are out in the fields working for less than three dollars per day, 12 hours a day. While we stand here, there are students in jail on trumped-up charges. Our brother James Farmer, along with many others, is also in jail.

"We come here today with a great sense of misgiving. It is true that we support the administration's Civil Rights Bill. We support it with great reservation, however. Unless title three is put in this bill, there's nothing to protect the young children and old women who must face police dogs and fire hoses in the South while they engage in peaceful demonstration."

Many others spoke that day as well: James Farmer, Roy Wilkins, Rabbi Uri Miller and Rabbi Joachim Prinz, to name a few. We owe it to them and ourselves to remember what that day really was and the context in which it was born if we are to learn from its lessons or continue its work.

Here in 2013, the American avatar, President Barack H. Obama, embodies the mythological meaning of the March on Washington. President Obama is argued as the embodiment of Dr. King's dream, but he is not. The movement upon which the moment of that march is elevated in history was about much more than cosmetic changes. Perhaps it is time, as the march is remembered on this 50th anniversary, for another speech — not a speech about the 20th century, but about the 21st. It is time for a speech not about yesterday, but about today and tomorrow.

In these moments that we remember the March on Washington and those who sacrificed their lives to change our America for the better, the memory of those brave men and women call to us to muster the courage necessary to continue the struggle for jobs and freedom. Their memory calls us to correct the course of reckless and ruinous excesses of the U.S. government and her corporate bosses.

We, like them, realize that the American Empire has swallowed the Republic those flawed founding fathers attempted to create and we must join their ardent struggle for a democracy. There is a deep moral basis for the nation we seek. But when justice does not roll down like water, it must well up like mountains from the hearts and hard work of those who will have nothing else.

A New Dream for New Times

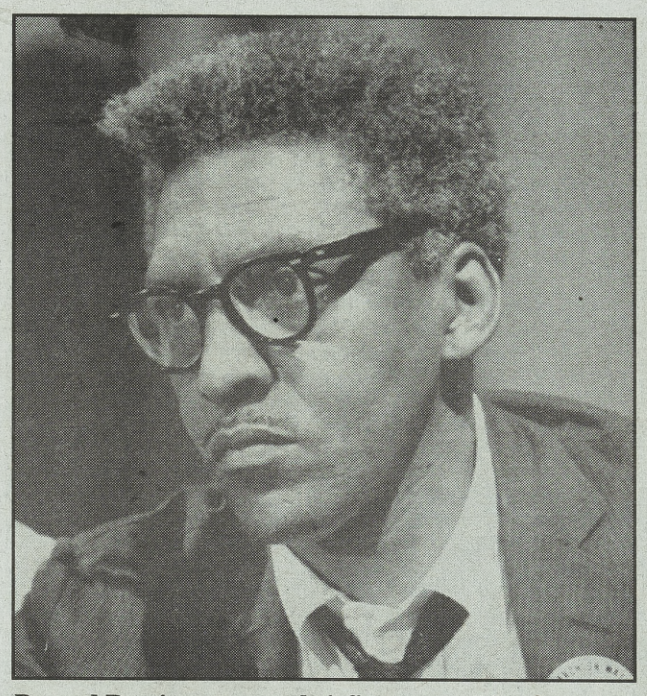
So, it is time to propose a new speech, a speech not about yesterday, but about today. Let us imagine a speech about our context given, not by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., for his was too eloquent a voice and presence. Rather, let us imagine being the speechwriter for one of the rabbis or some preacher of no particular fame.

And let us imagine ourselves preparing, not for a million-person march to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, let us imagine a speech published in a non-mainstream newspaper. Let us imagine a missive written in an underground newspaper dedicated to the same notions of justice, jobs, freedom and housing that the movement 50 years ago had. Perhaps the Rabbi would write something like this:

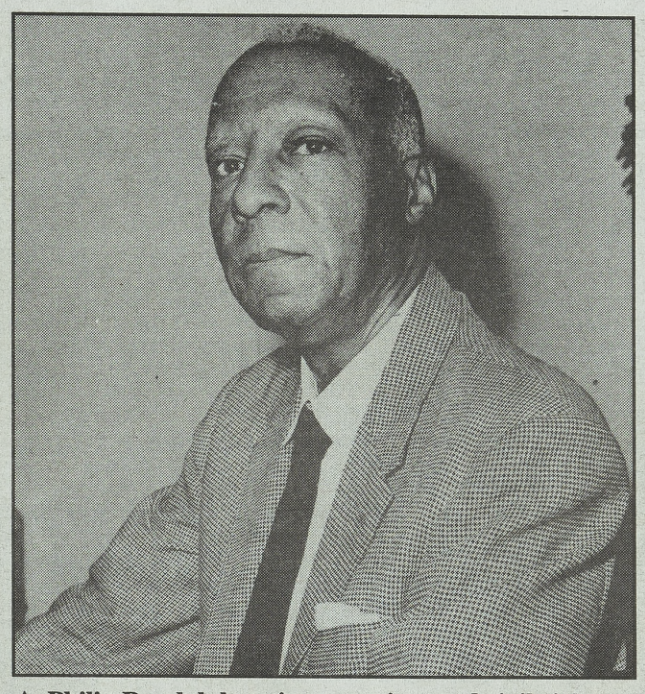
I want to begin by saying that we live in perilous times. I will mention in a moment some present perils, but aren't all times perilous for the poor and oppressed? History records natural disasters, famines, plagues, and volcanic eruptions, as well as the more insidious corruptions from human hands — the ravages of war, the genocidal adventures and the gold-lust greed that drives them both. History declares that the saga of human society is replete with travesty.

Still, we are here to remember that the gloom of oppressive darkness has been dispelled again and again by those who would shine a light against it: Moses, Miriam and their band of formerly unorganized brickmakers; Mary and Joseph who raised that trouble-making, paradigm-shifting Jesus; Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner and all those whose ferocity struck the pillars of America until slavery lost its respectability and had to slip behind bars and concrete walls. May I mention the Lakota Chief, Crazy Horse, who deeply understood the difference between what

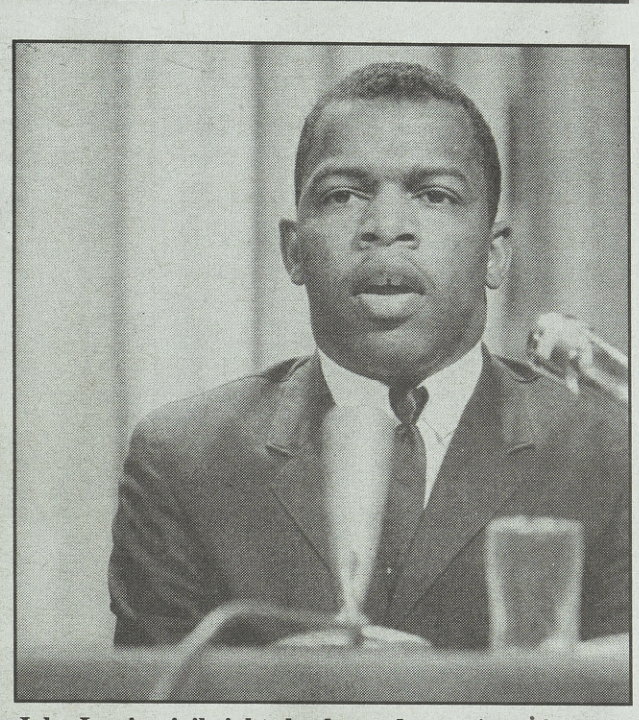
See **Long March to a New Dream** *page 7*



Bayard Rustin at a news briefing on the March on Washington in the Statler Hotel, August 27, 1963.
Photo by Warren K. Leffler



A. Philip Randolph, union organizer and civil rights leader who envisioned the March on Washington, 1963.
Photo by John Bottega, New York World-Telegram & Sun



John Lewis, civil rights leader and organizer of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).
Photo by Marion S. Trikosko, U.S. News and World Report

The Long March to a New Dream of Justice

from page 6

God had given and what white nationalists had taken away?

I could go on and list the past contests between darkness and the beacons of light that dispelled it, but it would be an error to compare the battles of history with the conflicts of today. Every age has its own particular clarion call. So, without diminishing the perils of the past or exaggerating the peril of the present, I want to say that the work that is extant for our lives is sobering. The work that is before us is dark and daunting and we will need the collective light of our allegiances and we must forge strategic alliances to dispel the dark forces arrayed against us.

There are many troubles that afflict us today. If we were to begin with the long view, we would hear Mother Earth herself groan beneath the weight of our licentiousness. Peak oil is past and yet our addiction has us digging in tar sands like a junkie sucking at the residue of a crack pipe. The ecological turmoil of climate change is the unspoken cause for new wars and exported tyranny. We are at war with the earth. Instead of marriage, we would put the earth on the street and pimp her to our own degradation and demise.

Desperate for a high, American capitalism furrows into her soil, decapitates her mountains, pollutes her rivers and streams, and soils the air we are meant to breathe. The exploitation of the earth was never right and has always been unjust. Instead of the human race existing in harmony with the earth, humanity has become the yeast infection of the planet, exchanging the earth's sugars for carbon dioxide and alcohol. We are at war with the earth and I am here to tell you, my dear reader, that the earth will win.

And let us consider this great nation in which we exist. Let us consider the ubiquitous surveillance, which principally arrives to further our economic exploitation, but quickly becomes a tool for those drunk with power to further exploit and control "We the people." The terror, it seems, is not so much the snooping capabilities of our government as it is the near total lack of any expectation of privacy.

We have a generation of people who have given away their right to privacy as well as yours and mine for the convenience of desktop consumption. We have a generation and a half of citizen consumers who do not understand that the dollar store has come to suck the very last pennies from their community.

We have citizens who are anesthetized and inured to the squeeze of impoverishment even as they disparage the necessity of workers organizing for fair and just wages. The OurWalmart workers, the fast food workers, those working in the recycling centers around the Bay Area who are beginning to strike and call for just treatment and living wages, are on the front lines of a movement for all of us.

Let me mention what Edward Snowden has proven and many of us suspected all along. The America we live in is committed to the unconstitutional and illegal recording and keeping of every electronic communication we produce.

A WORLD GONE WRONG

America is invested in the extrajudicial, immoral and randomized, murderous drone killings anywhere the president chooses. We have kill lists and military tribunals. We have created and maintain the netherworld Guantanamo gulag, and torture the imprisoned at will. We incarcerate more of our citizens than any nation on the planet and allow the investor class to gorge themselves on a privately owned and operated prison-industrial complex.

All this under an administration the left is said to have won. I'm not sure if the left won, but I am positive the right didn't lose.

The Obama administration is nice, intelligent and affable, but from its rabid attacks on whistleblowers to its zealous deportation of now over a million men, women and children, the actions of this administration should forever remove it from the Pollyanna-ish notion that it has any left-of-center leanings.

Professor Obama continues to teach us the lessons of his predecessor and has added some new ones besides. Under Obama, Lynn Stewart languishes in prison, perhaps condemned to an administrative execution as her breast cancer metastasizes to teach us that lawyers owe their allegiance to the state and not to any notion of law.

Julian Assange, safe for the moment in the Ecuadorian embassy, and Edward Snowden rightly fear for their freedom, lives and safety, and are persecuted to teach us that journalist have only the right to publish the authorized lies of the state.

Widespread unemployment and underemployment amidst rusting bridges and unpaved roads are there to teach us to beg for our wages and be content with whatever crumbs fall from the table to us.

Quantitative Easing is destroying the value of our money and has created hundreds of billions of dollars to bail out "banksters" who have already drowned in their greed and our pensions. They have already eaten our homes and savings accounts. This U.S. brand of austerity exists to teach us how to be slaves again.

We can no longer blame Bush or Cheney. We can no longer blame just the Republicans, but we must add to the list of infamy President Obama and the Democratic Party he leads. America should be better than this.

But let us not just speak in national terms. The City of Oakland, after ten years of watchful oversight of the police department, still has not yielded any significant positive results. We change police chiefs like Imelda Marcos changed shoes. Budgets passed at one City Council meeting disappear in the next. Jobs promised in the first year of a project disappear before the second year commences.

The Port of Oakland, like Piedmont, exists as an island of prosperity in the slough of despond and despair, unaccountable and unrelated to the citizens to whom it belongs. Our children are unsafe even in our homes. The Oakland Unified School District, once the premier and envy of the nation, now languishes as an embarrassment to the notion of education.

RISING TIDE OF POVERTY

There is much work to be done in our city. Yet there is not enough political will and nascent unfocused people power to effectively put worker and work together in a manner that reads "living wage job."

There's plenty of work to be done in Oakland and there is plenty of work that needs to be done all over America — and there are plenty of hard-working people willing and able to perform the tasks that desperately need to be done. There is just no pay offered in exchange for the labor.

There are trends in America that seem disposed to allow most of us to slide back into slavery. What else are we to call the uncompensated labor we are all asked to embrace? City employees are asked to take furlough days, hourly workers are asked to clock out but continue to work, truck drivers are called independent in order to export the cost of delivering goods and exploit their time and labor. The list could go on and the travesty is real.

Poverty is on the rise in America, but we are not poor because we are lazy. Our work as well as our lives are disrespected, not because of who we are or because we are devoted to unprofitable vocations. We are caught in a spiral of declining wages and increasing poverty as a result of deliberate decisions made by men (they are mostly men) who would impoverish a generation if it would enrich them and their benefactors.

America's trade policies, financial regulations and laws lead to the impoverishment of many of its citizens. Any politician with intelligence or insight knows this. Still, lawmakers are not solely responsible for the unraveled U.S. economy. The very political system of our nation from its inception harbored ill will for the un-propertied poor, women and all but those with the power to become "white men."

America has yet to fully franchise her citizens. In the past, it offered scattered opportunities for those willing to sacrifice family, community and, for some, identity to ascend on a rising wave of wealth. But the private accumulation always came at a cost that left more ruin or waste in its wake than gain. Now that we languish in the waste and debris of America's war on the poor, what shall we do?

Fifty years ago, there were vibrant and active organizations fighting to remedy the American misdeeds. There was the NAACP, SNCC, Congress for Racial Equality, The National Urban League, The American Jewish Congress, The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the AFL-CIO, among many others, including many major denominations. Today many of these organizations remain active and are still fighting for jobs and freedom.

Now, they are augmented by an alphabet soup of organizations across the nation. Here in the Bay Area, we have the Faith Alliance for a Moral Economy (FAME), Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), and the Ella Baker Center. Spreading across the nation, there are organizations such as Green for All, Interfaith Worker Justice movement, Jobs With Justice, Critical Resistance and many more.

What we need in America, even more than another organization, is a new imagination. "We the people" need to have a fresh imagination that leads to positively invigorated conversations about what it means to be human and what it means to be an American. And we must begin that conversation understanding that what it means to be a human being must always trump what it means to be an American.

THE FOUR FREEDOMS

Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his presidential address to the U. S. Congress on January 6, 1941, sought to fashion this America and the world on four freedoms. The first is the freedom of speech and expression. The second is the freedom to worship God in one's own way (if one chooses). The third is the freedom from want. Finally, his fourth was the freedom from fear. The moment we live in is desperate for these freedoms.

Well, that would be my speech. For the next few years there will be more opportunities to commemorate the 50th anniversary of various milestones of the Civil Rights movement. When those moments arrive, let us not use them solely to remember what others have done.

Rather, let us use each remembered milestone to empower, embolden and revitalize the work we are engaging in every day to bring jobs, freedom and justice. And like the bold activists of the past, let us use the power of nonviolence to create an America without the villainy of war, the desperation of poverty, or the need for avatars.

Rev. Brian K. Woodson is an Oakland pastor and an activist for social justice.

S.F. Peace Vigil: A Witness to Nonviolent Action

"War is futile. By and large, people do not want war. The government has to sell them war." — Markley Morris, S.F. peace vigil

by Dylan Thiermann

Since October 12, 2001, a group of people from faith-based organizations such as the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, the American Friends Service Committee, Church Women United, San Francisco Friends Meeting, and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship have been vigiling by the old San Francisco Federal Building on Thursdays from noon to 1:00 p.m. to protest the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The vigilers stand at the corner of Larkin Street and Golden Gate Avenue, some holding a silent witness for peace, others chatting with each other and with the occasional friendly passer-by. Cars honk with approval as they drive by, and passengers on sightseeing buses cheer, enthused by the message of peace and nonviolence.

The vigilers hold signs reading, among other things: "War is Terrorism," "Stand with Us Against All Wars" and "Bring the Troops Home Now." A large banner reads "Quaker Witness for Peace and Justice."

The vigil started out fairly small, with around 16 people attending in 2002, and then grew as U.S. military involvement in the Middle East began in earnest.

Markley Morris, a Quaker and longtime vigil participant, recalls that during the week before the United States invaded Iraq, "People were roaming the streets of San Francisco, looking for a way to protest, to witness against the war.... I'd guess maybe a hundred people joined the vigil that day but I have no idea how many knew who we were and were actually opposed to all war."

Since then, the vigil has declined in numbers, but it has continued in steadfast opposition to war. Although the vigilers may be few, they are dedicated to the display of their nonviolent beliefs.

Stephen Matchett, holding the banner proudly, sums up the vigil's purpose in one eloquent sentence. "We are witnessing to the existence of an alternative to war-making as a response to being attacked," he says.

Other vigilers echo Matchett: "War is futile," says Morris. "By and large, people do not want war. The government has to sell them war."

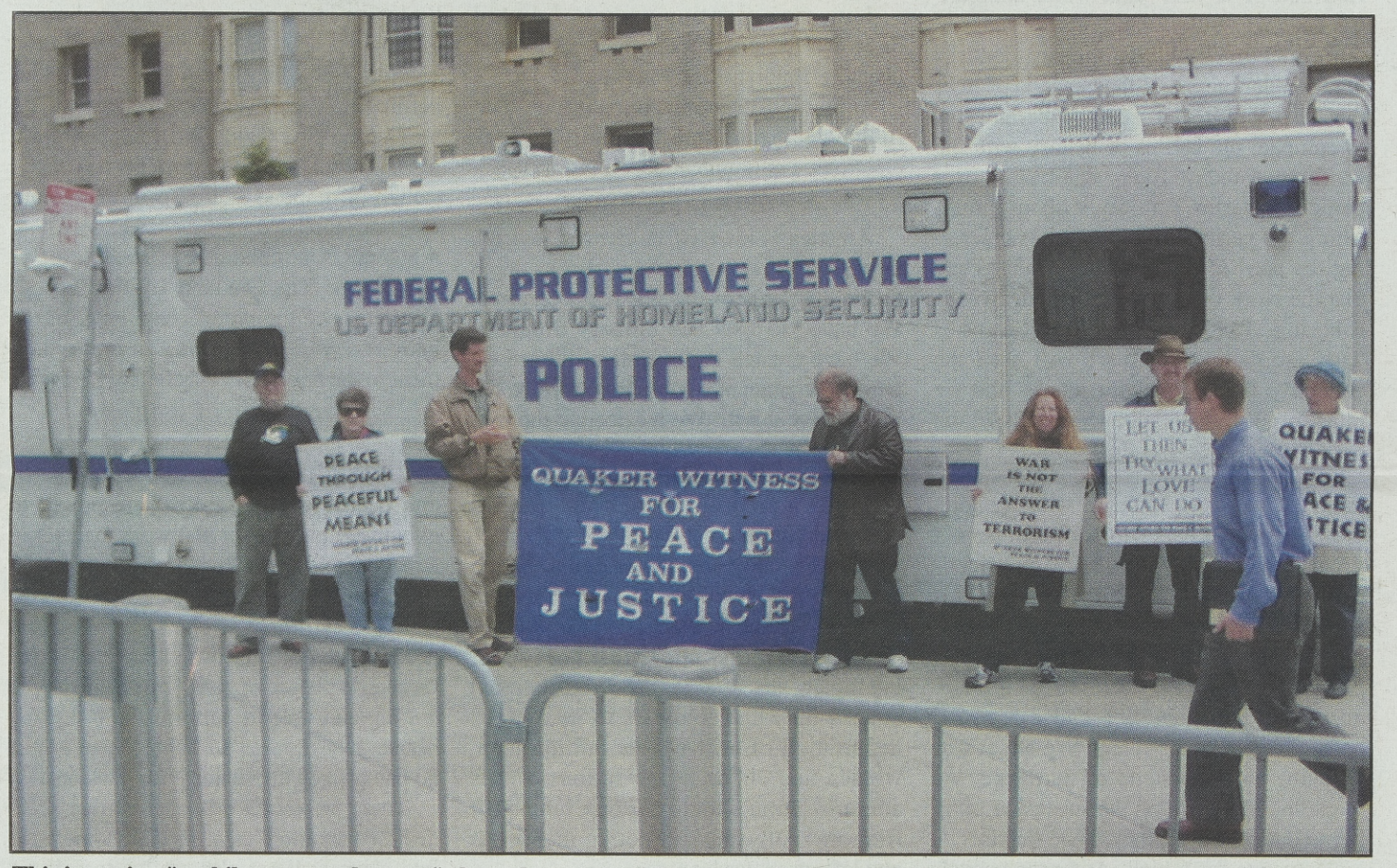
As Michele Gloor puts it: "Sending in planes and guns just makes things worse."

This neighborhood has experienced various peace events since the beginning of the Iraq war. In 2006, activists set out hundreds of boots on Civic Center Plaza to represent soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The vast field of empty combat boots in front of City Hall stood lined up as though in military formation — silent testimony to the mounting fatalities caused by the overseas wars waged by the United States.

Phyllis Malandra also recalls the numerous "die-ins" that were common earlier in the vigil's history, where peace activists lay down in front of the Federal Building, blocking the entrance, as if they were dead soldiers. She remembers that the Episcopal bishop of California, in full ceremonial dress, once proceeded formally from Grace Cathedral to participate in the die-in. All these demonstrations helped bring attention to the vigilers and their message.

In lieu of violent intervention, the vigilers would like to see the United States rely more on diplomacy, sanctions, and peaceful aid to achieve its international aims. Many of them have spent their lives working towards this goal.

Dedicated activists have steadfastly sustained a weekly peace vigil in San Francisco for the past 12 years. Markley Morris photo



This imposing "mobile command center" showed up at the S.F. peace vigil on June 3, 2004. Homeland Security parked the intimidating command center near the peace vigil. A guard told the vigilers it cost $3 million. Markley Morris photo

Lois Roberts participated in Fremont peace marches as a teacher. She recalls that they started out "friendly, almost picnic-like," and then became "hairier" as more people's kids were drafted. Matchett remembers taking part in a demonstration in the late 1960s that closed the highway illegally in order to march down it.

Morris protested issues such as nuclear testing and the Vietnam War during the 1960s. Gloor has taken part in peace vigils and demonstrations in Washington, D.C. For them, activism was a natural response to the social turmoil of the '60s.

People began coming to the vigil for a variety of reasons. When Matchett was growing up, his parents vigiled near the Federal Building in Seattle, so he was used to the practice. He joined the San Francisco vigil when it began in October 2001 in response to the bombing of Afghanistan.

Malandra used to go to the dental school in San Francisco on Thursdays for her dental treatments. It was convenient for her to go to the vigil afterwards. Gloor was concerned about the Iraq war. After she retired, she became involved in the 2003 protests against the war, and then joined the vigil.

Roberts didn't believe that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. She felt that it was the people's duty to try and get the U.S. government out of war.

What all the vigilers shared was a love of peace and a distrust of war. They have encountered some interesting characters during their weekly vigils. Once almost every vigil, a man driving a car shouts, "Boring!" as he passes by. The vigilers have dubbed him "the boring man."

Matchett recalls that the man once said, "Something-something ... go back to Walnut Creek." He adds: "I think he's mistaking us for someone else."

Says Malandra: "Maybe we'd be less boring if we did a little dance."

This is a good example of the kind of friendly banter that goes on during the vigil and makes it an enjoyable way to express one's political opposition to war.

The vigilers do not worry about their lack of influence on government policy. "I have no illusion that sitting here is going to change things," says Roberts jokingly, "but I *like* sitting in the sun."

It is simply an important part of their spiritual and political lives. "It satisfies my conscience," says Gloor humorously.

On the serious side, Malandra describes it as a form of public witness and weekly practice. "I feel it is necessary to display one's feelings on government policies to the government so that your position is acknowledged and respected," she says.

Some vigilers also discuss the role of today's youth in political affairs. Roberts laments that youth are complicit in the government's wars. She finds it frustrating that young people go into the military to get their education paid for.

As I talk with Roberts and Gloor, I begin to wonder if their generation was more politically active than the youth of today. When I voice this concern, Gloor notes that due to the absence of a draft, the war in Afghanistan does not affect youth to the same extent as the war in Vietnam did, meaning that youth are not driven to protest as much. She is not sure if youth are generally less politically active, though.

Some of the vigilers still conduct peace work outside the vigil. For example, Matchett works for the Alternatives to Violence Project in California women's prisons. However, for many, age limits their ability to continue further peace work, making the vigil their only chance to practice the principles they stand by.

In this way, the vigil assumes its most meaningful purpose: giving people a convenient way to voice their concerns about the direction this nation is heading.

"I am very thankful for the vigil," says Markley Morris. "Without it, there's no effective way to express the things we believe in."